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### Honor New Mexico's Veterans by Funding VA On Time

The people of New Mexico have a unique history of service in defense of America. When our nation has put out the call for service, our state has answered. We have made a permanent home for our national laboratories and military bases. The unbreakable Navajo Code Talkers hail from our state. And perhaps most importantly, countless sons and daughters of our state have selflessly served our nation in times of war. That's why when I was sworn into Congress I made it a top priority to work for and earn a seat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC).

As I began work in the HVAC one of the things I was most disappointed to find was that Congress has consistently passed late budgets for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). 19 of the last 22 budgets for the VA have been late. As a direct provider of services, VA operations benefit greatly from advance notice regarding resource allocation. Late budgets threaten quality of care, further hinder the ability to recruit well-trained medical professionals, maintain operational facilities, and acquire new equipment.

That is why, from my first months in Congress, I have advocated for advanced appropriations for the VA. Many people have compared advanced appropriations to a family budget. A family needs to know how much their income is before they know what they can spend. Because the VA is a direct provider of services, they need to have the same ability to plan ahead.

New Mexico's veterans served their country and provided us the security we often take for granted, and we owe them the support and services they have earned, including quality health care. Without a predictable and on-time funding source, it is difficult or impossible for the VA to provide our veterans with the high level of health care and services they deserve. Earlier this year I led 50 Democratic and Republican members of Congress to demand a provision allowing for advance appropriations in the fiscal year 2010 budget. And when the President didn't include in the budget he presented to Congress, I voted against the budget. Fortunately, my colleagues and I were able to convince the Congressional budget conference committee to support it. As a cosponsor of H.R. 1016, a bipartisan bill to make advanced appropriations for the VA permanent, I am proud to say that both the House and Senate have approved this bill and I hope the President will sign it as soon as possible.

Despite all these efforts and the progress we have made, 2010 will be yet another year in which we do not approve the veterans' budget on time. Last week the Senate held hearings on the Military Construction and VA spending bill that was referred out of the House. This bill contains \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for the VA for FY 2011 which represents a 15% increase over FY 2009 levels and a step in the right direction for veterans' health care. The Senate should not wait another day to act on this vital legislation.

Advance appropriations has been endorsed by virtually every major veterans and military service organization, including the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion. These groups know it is the right thing to do and I believe that the vast majority of my colleagues know it is the right thing to do.

I urge the Senate to pass the Military Construction and VA spending bill and I urge the President to sign H.R. 1016 to make advanced appropriations permanent immediately so our veterans can have the security and quality of service that they have earned. I hope that this year will mark the time in our history when we worked in a bipartisan manner to finally begin to put the needs of our veterans first. They've waited long enough.

*Congressman Harry Teague represents New Mexico's 2nd Congressional District; he serves on the House Veterans Affairs Committee. Any Veteran seeking assistance can contact one of his 6 regional offices by calling 1-888-9-TEAGUE or visiting his website [www.teague.house.gov](http://www.teague.house.gov).*